

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL TERRY
FERRELL, USA, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 10:00 A.M. EST DATE:
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2008

Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

COL. FERRELL: Thank you for taking time this morning to participate in
the discussion, and just a brief opening statement. Then I'll be more than happy
to answer any questions you may have.

As many of you that are participating may already know, we are the last
of the search brigades. And we operate as 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division,
part of the MND-C Task Force Marne. We own and are responsible for --
(inaudible) -- region.

We just recently completed Operation Marne Thunderbolt, part of the
overall corps-level Operation Phantom Phoenix. The operation was very
successful for several reasons. And key to that -- we now own, throughout the
OE, all of the terrain. We were able to enter into areas that we have not been
recently, from Orjab (sp), Ad Diwaniyah, Abuwaitha (sp). We now are down into
Saifiyah.

We entered into this operation same as we did when we first started
back in June -- intel-focused, focused on the enemy, going into areas that
we've not been before. And we systematically targeted known locations for IEDs,
caches and enemy safe houses. And that's how we knew where we could put our
ground troops in and what they would encounter.

We were able to focus on those targets through the use of a combined
effort with Air Force -- (inaudible) -- indirect, and all the systems we were
able to bring to bear, we were able to do systematic approach and get our forces
in that facilitated us now getting to the point we are today.

This allowed us to get into the fight and defeat the threat that we
were facing as we moved through to the point now that top and mid- level AQI
leadership that was in the area have either been killed or captured or they've
fled out of the battle space.

One of the greatest reasons for the success of Marne Thunderbolt was
the addition of 5/7th Cav out of the 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division. These
soldiers were working out of MND-West, and they came in to us in January. And
they've been a tremendous asset as part of Marne Thunderbolt, and hugely
successful in the operations we've asked them to do.

In addition, the support and partnership that we've had with the Iraqi Security Forces and the Sons of Iraq have allowed us to get into Saifiyah, Zambarniyah (sp) and areas further south, to work now to work the other -- (inaudible) -- the other areas in the non-lethal side, to continue to develop throughout the OE.

As we worked into the area, we were greeted by the people because they'd been waiting for the opportunity to get the coalition force and the Iraqi Security Forces further down into the southern portions of the Arab Jabour region to lift the veil, per se, of al Qaeda that they've been living under the fear of. And today, just today, I was in the area. People were back in the streets. People are working very hard to get their life back to normal. And it's all been very worthwhile.

And with that, I'm more than happy to take your questions.

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Thank you very much, sir, Colonel Terry Ferrell, commander, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, from Multinational Division-Center, with us for the Bloggers Roundtable today.

Farooq Ahmed (sp), you were first with us, so why don't you get us started?

Q Good morning, sir, or I guess it's evening over there.

I'm wondering if you could provide any insight as far as the operations -- sorry -- your cooperation with Iraqi Security Forces in the area? What was their performance like? What was your role in cooperating with them, like degree of oversight, that sort of thing? COL. FERRELL: The cooperation that we have with the Iraqi Security Forces within our area of operations is phenomenal. We have one battalion that currently works in our area, and they are working in true partnership as we go through. Many of the operations specifically from Marne Thunderbolt, they were leading the operations in specific pieces of terrain. And their performance has been outstanding.

They have been instrumental working with the Sons of Iraq identifying IEDs, working to clear areas that were laden with explosives. And another piece that they were able to perform, not only working with the Sons of Iraq to do that, to clear the terrain; they've been instrumental in bringing back families, because as we've cleared through the various areas working from northwest to southeast, we've had families now coming back in.

And the security force has really just been instrumental to help resettle those people as they've come back in, to ensure that al Qaeda is not trying to come back in or stay amongst the ranks as they vet the individuals that are working their way back in.

They are very well-trained. They're very focused on the mission. And I will tell you that they perform superbly daily.

Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. David Axe.

Q Sir, this is David Axe from War Is Boring. Thanks for taking the time.

So the Sons of Iraq, are they playing an intel role at all in feeding information, I mean, nitty-gritty detailed information to you that you can't get otherwise?

COL. FERRELL: They provide the intelligence of knowing the terrain, able to identify known locations, potential improvised explosive devices, picking out caches. They're able to identify strangers in the community. They're able to identify who al Qaeda -- or who the enemy is that has been in and amongst their communities that have forced them to live the life they have. So, yes, they provide excellent intelligence.

Q How does --

COL. FERRELL: (Inaudible) -- yesterday, for example.

Q Well, how -- I'm sorry?

COL. FERRELL: Go ahead.

Q How do you vet that information? How do you know that you can trust them? COL. FERRELL: Well, we've worked with them very closely.

They go through a very detailed process to get it entered in through the biometric data. We know who they are. And then, as part of the process of working with them every day and what they provide for us, if they tell us that an IED is at this location, normally generally they're the ones who are pulling the IED out of the ground.

That's one source of confirmation; the same thing with caches. They will not only tell us that a cache or an IED is at this location; they also bring it to us. And then the confirmation of when they say, "Intel of potential enemy at this grid or at this location," we have other sources to validate that as well. But just the information alone on the IEDs is such a tremendous asset. Yesterday (alone ?), working with the Sons of Iraq, one company-sized element found 25 IEDs.

In the overall area of operations, I've had one battalion that works for the brigade found 167 IEDs throughout Marne Thunderbolt. And it was in direct coordination, working with the Sons of Iraq that live in that terrain, live in that community, know the community, know the trademarks, what to look for, and are willing to go out and try to assist our forces as we go through this -- (inaudible).

Q Okay, thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Andrew?

Q Yes, Colonel, Andrew Lubin from OnPoint. Good evening, sir.

COL. FERRELL: Good evening, sir.

Q I was down with Colonel Agee (sp) down in al Mazen (sp) back about three weeks ago, four weeks ago. And how is he doing?

COL. FERRELL: Yes, you were.

Q How have they pushed down? And how is he doing picking up his (HBTs ?)?

COL. FERRELL: He's doing very well.

Q (Inaudible.) COL. FERRELL: The battalion is doing tremendously well. Ken Agee (sp) and the troopers of 130th have had a tremendous fight, as you well know; you were part of it. You endured some of the harsh weather that they had to get through. But it's been a good operation for them. They worked their way through from north to south. They've expanded their lines further south, much further south. We've linked up now with 5/7th Cav much -- came across from east to west. And Ken now has been able to close all the areas that he at one time was not able to get to. He's identified numerous caches. They've cleared several.

I was referring to the battalion that had the 160-plus IEDs. That was Ken's battalion that cleared those IEDs. And they work very, very well with the Sons of Iraq; established that to (thicken ?) the lines and continue to grow. And now they're working very hard on the infrastructure, getting the infrastructure, identifying what needs to be done there, and specifically along the Tigris, as you're well familiar with the pumping systems and getting the water flowing and seeing what the status of electricity is further into the zone.

Q Is he still the biggest (employer ?)? How are his CLC programs coming along?

COL. FERRELL: He -- the Sons of Iraq are doing very well. The other projects, the other aspects within the community, you will see, are starting to grow. We see through the microgrant process, local businesses are starting to pick up. It's farming season. It's starting to grow. As you should have observed, crops are planted. Farmers are getting back into the field. And as we move further south, we've discovered that, you know, they are in the fields as well.

So we're working very closely with them. And, of course, our PRT is working very closely with the farmers union that we've established, trying to get established, and have two currently up and running to get the farmers back out into the fields. That's part of getting the water flowing so that we can get those crops growing and get that aspect of the economics moving. So we see some growth.

We see a lot of businesses that have been closed are now back open across the width and depth of the operational environment. And we see new businesses, even though they may be small, starting to open and starting to grow because of the security that is established. And that is attributed to the Sons of Iraq and our efforts and the Iraqi Security Forces. So as you observed with Ken, there are a large number out there working, but they are transitioning, and that's all good news as well.

Q Appreciate it. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And Jared. Q Yes, sir. Thank you for your time.

If we could shift maybe from the tactical up to the strategic in your area of operations. Can you talk to from the time that you've been in Iraq, how have you viewed the progress of the development of the different factions which

all have to work together, from the central government in Nafiyah (sp) to -- (inaudible) -- within the Iraqi Security Forces, within the Sons of Iraq. Is there a type of cooperation? Have you seen any types of issues of concern or things where things are moving in a positive direction? I just want to get your thoughts on that.

COL. FERRELL: Well, actually, what I see is in our area I do see positive steps occurring. Our area is very rural in nature, as I've described it. It is truly farmers in the fields working. There was no governance per se established when we came back in June of 2007 and first came in.

We now see the local government starting to form, reaching in from the district because of the way we are divided from Baghdad, from West Rashid, and then reaching in from Al Rashid from the various levels from the (NAC ?), and then from the qadha in Mahmudiyah. We see great interest. Just today the Ministry of Electricity is working in the most southern portions of our battle space, where they would not have gone just three weeks ago, to work electrical issues for the families that need the electricity. And, of course, it applies all the way back into Baghdad.

We have numerous representatives from the local government, from the nahiya, reaching down to help the community, to try to get the voice and the recognition they need. So we see that occurring. And our PRT has been a huge asset in doing that. Of course, the forming of the local councils in these small communities, to get some organization, some governance there, so they too can reach out. It's got to be both ways, and we see that happening.

And then, as you go back higher, right now what our concern is is can we get the local levels working up and down the chain. And then, as time will tell, we will see the provincial and so forth. But we've had the governor down working into Arab Jabour. There's been great, great emphasis put into Orjab (sp), Ad Diwaniyah. You see growth there.

You see interest from the MOH, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, with the schools and the clinics. So we do see that. And as the area has become more secure, that is attributed to our efforts, the Sons of Iraq's efforts, and Iraqi Security Forces, all working combined. That has been the reason this now is starting to transition. And that, as I said, I see as positive steps. And we have a governance center in Arab Jabour, working governance centers now in Orjab (sp) and Ad Diwaniyah. And the growth will only continue now as a result of Marine Thunderbolt and the area's security firmly established all the way down to our southeasternmost limit of advance with boundary restrictions down in Saifiya. MR. HOLT: Okay. Chuck.

Q Good evening, sir. Chuck Simmons from America's North Shore Journal.

Two questions; one probably you have a quick answer to. Are you able to comment on the incident this past week involving the Sons of Iraq in a firefight with our guys?

COL. FERRELL: Really, I can't.

As far as knowledge of that, I don't even have knowledge of that one, sir.

Q Okay. All right. Then my other question: With the IEDs spread out so extensively, are they being used as the insurgent equivalent of a mine field for area denial, or are they being used to kind of block choke points, and you know the area you can still get around?

COL. FERRELL: Well, I will tell you, sir, that from June of 2007 to now, what we've discovered -- and I've said it in many different forums -- the enemy that we have fought in this specific region, in our battlefield, the enemy had developed a very deliberate defensive belt. He was able to take his IEDs and array them in a very elaborate mine field, various patterns, using different -- from anti-personnel to anti-vehicular IEDs, as they were arrayed. Some were focused on choke points, of course.

I mean, he understood where we would go or what type of movement we could potentially have. He wanted to deny us access to certain locations. And as we moved through, we observed that. Of course, if you recall early on in January, when we first commenced this operation, we did shaping operations focused on the IEDs and focused on the caches, two rather large kinetic operations on the 10th and on the 20th of January, to reduce those capabilities, erode those resources, focused on deep buried IEDs, focused on numerous locations that we thought along the way we would see those.

We had success on those. And as we've encountered more and got into his security belts further to the south, we're now seeing where he has arrayed the patterns to protect, you know, C-2 and his support elements. So, yes, he fully understood how to array a mine field.

Q Okay. So what we're talking about is a Maginot Line type of in-depth defense to prevent you from getting into the rural area.

COL. FERRELL: Arab Jabour specifically -- we were put into Arab Jabour back in June because it was viewed by General Lensch (sp), and at that time, General Odierno, as the last of a sanctuary. General Lensch (sp) thought that we needed to come in and that was an area that needed the force and the focus. And it was obvious that there had been a great emphasis here by the enemy force. Al Qaeda that we were fighting here -- still today -- wanted to hold this. It was very important terrain to him. And he had had time to prep that terrain. So through a series of IEDs, from deep-buried to surface-laid -- we've encountered tree-borne IEDs, house-borne IEDs.

There was a very deliberate defensive pattern that was established as we went further into the zone, because the criticality of the avenue that flowed along the Tigris to give him the Tigris corridor and the ability to get into Baghdad or get further out west or to move north, he wanted to retain this. So, yes, there was a very well-defined defensive belt.

Just in the time that we have been doing Marne Thunderbolt, total IEDs, individual IEDs that we have found and cleared, the number is 267. On top of that, we've cleared 85 caches. And inside of that cache is "x" amount -- and I could go on with just numbers on top of numbers -- of IED-making capability inside of that cache, or those caches. That would have given him even greater capability to lay the IEDs.

Q Are you seeing explosively formed penetrators?

COL. FERRELL: No. No, we see, given the makeup of our population and the threat that we face, strictly deep-buried IEDs, surface-laid IEDs, some

house-born, and I told you about the tree. Ours are predominantly military-grade munitions. And as we got further into the zone, we started to encounter more and more home-made explosives, HME-type IEDs. And it was a variation between anti- vehicular and anti-personnel. But the EFPs we have not encountered within our area of operations specifically with Marne Thunderbolt.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any follow-up questions? All right, Colonel Ferrell. Well, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon.

Q Sorry. Can I follow up with a question?

MR. HOLT: Yeah, sure.

Q Farooq Ahmed (sp) again.

Sir, I'm wondering if you can -- I guess yesterday the Iraqi government announced that they were going to hold elections in October. And I'm wondering if you can estimate, given the security situation in your area -- maybe it's looking too far ahead -- what do you think the required troop levels will be in your area to secure an election?

COL. FERRELL: Well, I can tell you where we are today. We are working on security every day. I know that people are making great strides. Security is improving every day, as is obvious, because people are coming back out in the streets. The Iraqi Security Forces is making strides. We need to work on an Iraqi police presence.

As I stated, we have one Iraqi battalion where we are now. And as time goes, the conditions changes, and those assessments will be continually made throughout the summer. Where we are today, we're working very diligently on security. And I'm very proud of the security we have established. But there's still a lot of work to be done. There's no doubt about that.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right. Well, Colonel Ferrell, thank you very much for joining us, Colonel Terry Ferrell, the commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Multinational Division-Center, with us this morning for the Bloggers Roundtable. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

COL. FERRELL: Okay, gentlemen. Thank you, and I appreciate you taking your time. Have a great day.

END.